



THE CAREER CENTER
Sample Personal Statement
Graduate School
PhD in African Studies

The essay below is taken from the book *Graduate admissions essays: Write your way into the graduate school of your choice (2000)* by Donald Asher.

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"The Real History"

It was February again and I could feel that familiar uneasiness returning to me. My fourth grade classmates' stares seemed to chain me to my seat with unbearable weight. I slumped in my chair, head lowered, eyes downcast staring at my open textbook. My nine-year-old body looked the physical portrayal of the effects of racism – degradation, self-consciousness, and embarrassment. My teacher's voice still rang in my mind, "Raina, would you like to read to the class the chapter on slavery?"

At the time, all I knew about my cultural background as an African-American was what the textbooks had made sure I understood – my history in this country began as a slave. This was among the only roles in the history books in which I was shown a reflection of myself – an image painted by someone else, an outsider looking in. I too felt as an outsider when my fourth grade teacher picked me out because of my color, asking me to read for my race to the rest of the class. It was not what the textbooks told me about my African-American heritage that had the greatest impact on me as a young person developing a worldview and a self-perspective. Rather, it was what the writers had strategically left out that stunted my knowledge, pride, and self-worth as a human being contributing to the achievements of the world.

African history before its transplanting, or "before its beginning again" in the New World, has been repeatedly and systematically written out of human history. This is one of the greatest oppressions affecting the African Diaspora. This failure to acknowledge and appreciate African contributions to human civilization creates a void in the self-development and self-perspective of the New World African individual. In turn, its ramifications ripple outward to contort how the rest of the world perceives us. As a developing African-American thinker, I was unable to connect myself to a cultural context greater than what my education had spoon-fed me: redundant images of slave auctions and sardine-packed cargo trains of which the textbooks seemed to never tire. Since that fourth grade experience my parents have taught me that in order to learn anything about myself I must take my own initiatives. It is imperative that I choose my own sources and find accounts of my people's experiences written from their own minds. This is my passion – actively investigating sources of knowledge from which I can draw my own conclusions. The systematic suppression of African history in conventional education has only added fuel to my curiosity to learn about a history in which a reflection of myself emanates from the center. I want to share my passion and my research findings with others, especially reaching children at an early age so that they may have firm foundations on which to build knowledgeable minds and healthy self-esteem.

As a double major at Beloit College in anthropology and classical civilizations I have a strong background from which I can develop a successful future *doing* my passion - researching and teaching. I want to concentrate on the sociocultural traditions of West Africa, as well as studying her great achievements and contributions of antiquity. I want to research how traditional social patterns have been transplanted among the Diaspora in the New World, especially among African-Americans. I want to investigate this through a historical-archaeological approach as well as from a modern perspective through cultural anthropology. In order to achieve this goal I must interact between a web of disciplines: African and African-